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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 HA-05 /057 W
----------007067 090212Z /23
O R 090111Z AUG 78 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1162
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3765

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PDIP, PINT, MPOL, HO, US
SUBJ: FOREIGN OFFICE CALLS IN AMBASSADORS TO EXPLAIN MELGAR'S RESIGNATION

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 3731, (B) STATE 200321, (C) TEGUCIGALPA 3754

1. SUMMARY: AT MEETING CALLED BY FOREIGN MINISTRY (REF C) AND ATTENDED BY ALL CHIEFS OF MISSIONS, GOH SPOKESMEN EMPHASIZED HONDURAS' COMMITMENT TO RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, PRESS FREEDOM, AND RESOLUTION OF BORDER DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR. THE SPOKESMEN ALSO CLAIMED THAT MANY OF THE RESIGNATIONS OF THE CABINET MINISTERS AND OTHERS WHICH REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AND THEY WILL CONTINUE IN OFFICE. THEY ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT. IT IS EVIDENT THE GOH IS MAKING AN EFFORT TO ASSURE INTERNATIONAL OPINION AND QUICKLY WIN SUPPORT SO THAT THE SITUATION RETURNS TO NORMAL. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ONE-HOUR MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY ENTIRE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
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IN OFFICE OF MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS. ANGEL FORTIN (NUMBER THREE AT FONMIN) OPENED SESSION BY EXPLAINING THAT JUNTA ASKED MINISTRY TO INVITE CHIEFS OF MISSIONS IN ORDER EXCHANGE IMPRESSIONS OF RECENT EVENTS. HE REMINDED US OF MELGAR'S RESIGNATION AND THEN TURNED MEETING OVER TO SAME THREE COLONELS WHO HAD VISITED ME IN ADVANCE OF RESIGNATION: TORRES ARIAS, BONILLA BLANCO, AND BUESO ROSA (REF A).

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3. TORRES DOMINATED DIALOGUE THROUGHOUT. HE BEGAN BY REMINDING US THAT CHANGE WAS IN NAME ONLY, NOT IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES. HE POINTED OUT ABSOLUTE CALM THAT WAS EVIDENT IN ENTIRE COUNTRY AND SAID HE BROUGHT US GREETINGS FROM JUNTA AND ARMED FORCES SUPERIOR COUNCIL. THE JUNTA, ACCORDING TO TORRES, HAD ASKED THREE COLONELS TO RESPOND TO ANY QUESTIONS WHICH WE MIGHT HAVE IN ORDER CLARIFY DOUBTS OUR GOVERNMENTS MIGHT HAVE. TORRES DESCRIBED COUNTRY'S CLIMATE OF TRANQUILITY AND FREEDOM OF PRESS. HE SAID THAT BECAUSE PRESS IS FREE AND BECAUSE IT CAN SPECULATE AND EXAGGERATE, JUNTA FELT IT WAS URGENT THAT WE BE GIVEN OPPORTUNITY ASK QUESTIONS DIRECTLY.

4. ECHOING WHAT FOREIGN MINISTER PALMA GALVEZ REPORTEDLY SAID IN BOGOTA, TORRES REAFFIRMED IT IS CONTINUATION OF SAME GOVERNMENT. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SINCE ARMED FORCES STARTED TO GOVERN THAT SUPERIOR COUNCIL (SC) FORMERLY KNOWN AS SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS BEEN ENTITY WHICH ESTABLISHES NORMS, OBJECTIVES, AND GOALS OF GOH. SC ALSO NAMES PERSON OR PERSONS WHO IMPLEMENT OR EXECUTE THESE POLICIES. ACCORDING TO TORRES IN LAST SUCH CHANGE (IN APRIL 1975) PAZ WAS NAMED TO HEAD ARMED FORCES AS INSTITUTION AND MELGAR WAS APPOINTED CHIEF OF STATE INORDER EXECUTE POLICIES. MELGAR WAS GIVEN LIBERTY AND FLEXIBILITY SO THAT HE COULD SELECT HIS OWN CAB-INET IN ORDER TO MEET GOALS SC HAD FORMULATED.

5. TORRES THEN REFERRED TO ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE WHICH HE CLAIMED CONFIDENTIAL

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SHOWS THAT THERE IS NO DESIRE ON PART OF ARMED FORCES TO STAY IN POWER. HE SAID THAT DECISION TO ACT WAS UNANIMOUS IN SC. HE RE-PEATED STATEMENT IN COMMUNIQUE PROMISING TOTAL RESPECT FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND PRESS FREEDOM. TORRES EMPHASIZED JUNTA WILL DEVOTE FULL ENERGY TO BORDER MEDIATION WITH SAME SPIRIT, SAME VIGOR, SAME GOOD FAITH AND SAME POLICIES WHICH HONDURAS HAS FOLLOWED TO DATE.

6. MELGAR WILL REMAIN IN MILITARY AWAITING FURTHER ORDERS, BUT NO ONWARD ASSIGNMENT WAS MENTIONED. HE WAS REMOVED BECAUSE SUPREME COUNCIL'S GOALS WERE NOT BEING MET AND THINGS WERE NOT RUNNING SMOOTHLY.

7. TORRES ALSO SAID MANY MINISTERS HAD QUIT BECAUSE THEY WERE FRIENDS OF MELGAR. TODAY JUNTA HAD APPROACHED MAJORITY OF THEM, AND THAT MAJORITY WOULD RETURN TO WORK SOON. HE SAID WE WOULD KNOW WHO NEW MINISTERS WOULD BE BY LATE TOMORROW.

8. THREE JUNTA MEMBERS WERE SELECTED RATHER THAN ONE TO AVOID RUMORS OF "CONTINUISMO" AS HAD OCCURRED WITH MELGAR. IN RE-SPONSE TO QUESTION BY ARGENTINE CHARGE IF OUR GOVERNMENTS WOULD BE EXPECTED TO RE-ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, ANSWER GIVEN

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WAS NEGATIVE SINCE GOH HOLDS THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE OF GOVERN-
MENT. MEETING ENDED WITH THREE COLONELS TELLING US THAT JUNTA HAS
ASKED US TO SEND OUT GREETINGS AND BEST WISHES TO OUR PRESIDENTS.

9. COMMENT: WHILE REPLACEMENT OF GENERAL MELGAR BY JUNTA HAS TO
DATE BEEN ACCEPTED CALMLY WITHIN HONDURAS, GOH IS AWARE OF MANY
INTERPRETATIONS THAT CAN BE PUT ON IT OVERSEAS AND IS MAKING AN
EFFORT TO SEE THAT ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS RETURN TO NORMAL AS
RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. THE NEXT FEW DAYS, WITH NEW APPOINTMENTS OR
CONFIRMATION OF HOLD-OVERS, SHOULD GIVE BETTER IDEA OF PLANS AND
POLICIES JUNTA INTENDS TO FOLLOW.
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